



They Wouldn't Believe Me

Mary Small, the Tiny Tot with the Grown-up Voice, Has Her Own Problems with a Skeptical Radio Audience

By Mary Small



I have to rehearse with my mother every day, but I like to sing and to play the piano

I HAVE the hardest time in the world making people believe the simplest of truths. At least 100,000 persons who have written to me and have talked to me, doubt that truth. They refuse to believe I am a little girl. They insist that I am a grown woman.

I was thirteen years old last May. I went on the air two years ago. I sing, and the reason people won't accept the truth about my age is that they say I "sing like a grown-up."

Mother and I used to worry as to how to answer these doubting letters. We didn't want people to believe that we were putting something over on them. After all, a deception of that sort is not impossible, in view of the fact that I can only be heard and not seen on the air—at least until television comes, anyway. It was my father, however, who finally suggested a solution.

"Why not," said my daddy, "have photographs—or photostatic copies—made of Mary's birth certificate? When a listener writes to Mary expressing doubt as to her age, we can reply by sending the copy of the birth certificate!"

It has worked out very nicely. But still some listeners refuse to believe. They write again, saying that Mary Small, whose birth certificate they received, is a child all right, but not the person they hear on the air! We haven't figured out a practical solution to that one. Theater appearances all over the country have helped to convince some of the doubters. The rest will be convinced when television arrives—and it cannot be too soon.

THE kind of letters I like the best are from girls and boys of my own age. I receive many of these. I like them because the kids never doubt my age, and write to me as if they liked me and my work.

I'm glad I am growing up. I'm thirteen now, and it won't be very long before I become a full-grown lady, and then I won't have to answer so many questions about my age.

Even when I appear in vaudeville, people will come backstage and ask many more questions. One man I remember was particularly hard to convince. He refused to accept the birth certificate as proof. He was a friend of the theater manager's, so we tried to answer all of his questions. My mother told me afterwards that he had cross-examined me in an attempt to trip me up about my age. He finally left with the parting statement that I was a midget!

Every week my mail from people all over the country whom I am glad to call my friends, brings in new questions. One of the most frequently asked is, "Do you get nervous before the microphone?"

The answer to that question is "No." I have been singing since I was six years old. Because I like singing so much, I am never afraid when I stand before the microphone. The only thing that might make me nerv-



At Mary Small's thirteenth birthday party (left to right) the Three X Sisters, William Wirges (in the rear) Mary, Irène Noblette and Tim Ryan

ous is when my father is at the studio. I try too hard then, so daddy doesn't listen in the studio any more, but hears my programs on the radio at home.

When I am away from the studios, I like to play with my own friends. There are several little girls who attend the Bentley School in New York with me. They come to my house, and we stage little plays and we dance, and sometimes my mother takes us all to the movies. Some of the girls like to come to the studio to hear me sing, and once I almost missed a broadcast because some of my friends came to the NBC studios with me.

I HAD fifteen minutes before the broadcast, so my friends asked me to show them around the studios. Mother said it was all right, as long as I watched the clock and was back in the studio five minutes before the broadcast. When we got out into the hall, we met somebody I love, and a person who has done a great deal for me. I mean Rudy Vallee. He was just coming from a broadcast rehearsal and stopped to chat with me. I saw that my friends were looking at him with awe in their eyes, so I asked Mr. Vallee if I could introduce them to him. He smiled and said "Yes," so I presented each of my friends. One of them was so nervous that she stammered "Pleased t-t-t-to m-m-m-meet you, M-m-m-mister Vallee!"

Before I knew it the time had flown by as we stood there talking to Mr. Vallee, when suddenly my mother hurried up to us and said, "Mary, you're on the air in thirty seconds!" I dashed into the studio, and had just enough time to catch my breath before I began to broadcast. That was a narrow escape, and it was the only time I ever came close to missing a broadcast. The next day my mother bought me a beautiful wrist

It's hard to be a child, is little Mary Small's only complaint as she contemplates the future

watch, so that I could always be reminded of the time and the fact that I was on the air. Whenever I meet Mr. Vallee now he smiles and asks me the time, and then asks what time I go on the air.

I AM happy to have a friend like Rudy Vallee. Two years ago I was brought to New York—I was eleven years old then—and I was given a chance on Mr. Vallee's program. After the first broadcast he came to me and said that I was a great singer, and that he wanted me to sing on his program many times again. I was never so happy in all my life! I asked Mr. Vallee for his autograph. He gave it to me—and then asked me for mine! I can play the piano. I have been taking piano lessons for five years, and hope some day to be able to play for myself as I sing.

I like to draw, and when I appear in vaudeville I spend the hours between shows—that is, when I'm not studying—drawing objects and people around me.

A lot of people ask me how I manage to keep up with my school work if I appear in theaters and have to rehearse pretty often for my broadcast. The answer is very simple. My broadcasting is never permitted to interfere with my school work. I attend the Bentley School every day. I am in New York. When I go out of town for theater appearances, a special tutor who knows just how much work the children in school will accomplish while I am away, accompanies me. When I return I go to classes again, and so I am just as advanced in my studies as the other children.

I love to collect autographs. I started with Rudy Vallee's, and now I have the autograph of almost every radio artist I have ever met. Another autograph I treasure highly is that of Governor Ritchie, of Maryland, and also that of Mayor Jackson, of Baltimore. Both these lovely and important people heard me sing when I was nine years old, and predicted that some day I would be important. I hope I can live up to that.

There are three lovely ladies to whom I owe a great deal. They are Vi and Pearl Hamilton, and Jessie Fordyce, whom you hear on the radio as the Three X Sisters. It was they who heard me in Baltimore when I was eleven years old and really got me started.

And, oh, yes, I've got a brother and a sister, back in Baltimore. I almost forgot. Neither of them sings, but my brother likes to visit the radio stations to see the machinery. He goes into the control room instead of staying outside to listen to me. But he says he might like to announce.

Maybe some day he would be my announcer when we both get big. Wouldn't it be funny if he could say, "Now, folks, my little sister will sing for you?"

Mary Small is now heard on a sustaining series on Wednesdays at 6:15 p. m. EST (5:15 p. m. CST; 4:15 p. m. MST; 3:15 p. m. PST) over an NBC-WEAF network.